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The Effect of Political Ideology on Reactions to Warning Labels and Consumption Regulations

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Three studies demonstrate that when the government is associated with the warning label, conservatives (but not liberals) decrease their intentions to quit smoking, increase their purchase intentions of unhealthy foods, and are more likely to order unhealthy side dishes when drink sizes are restricted by government regulations.

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Political Ideology and Consumer Behavior

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Paper #1: Political Ideology and Consumer Decision Making

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Paper #2: Stability vs. Change: The Effect of Political Ideology on Product Preference

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Paper #3: The Effect of Political Ideology on Reactions to Warning Labels and Consumption Regulations

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Paper #4: Conforming Conservatives: How Norms of Salient Social Identities Overcome 'Heartless Conservative' Tendencies

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SESSION OVERVIEW

Political ideology refers to “the set of attitudes that explains how society should work in order to achieve social justice and social order (Jost 2006).” Political ideology not only influences individuals’ behavior in politically related contexts (e.g., voting) but also influences our everyday preferences and consumption behavior. For example, recent research shows that conservative consumers shop at Walmart more often while liberal consumers go to Starbucks more often (Gelman 2008). Despite the fact that political ideologies are one of the important drivers determining our daily life consumption behaviors, it is surprising that a few researchers in the consumer literature have recently begun to empirically examine how political ideology influences consumer behavior in daily life (e.g., Fernandes and Mandel 2013, Khan et al. 2013, Kidwell et al. 2013). To address this gap, the papers comprising this session proposal are designed to answer the following question: “How does political ideology affect a wide variety of consumers’ reaction and behaviors (i.e., choices, persuasion, unhealthy behavior, and donation)?”

The first paper by Farmer and his colleagues examines how differences in political ideology impact consumer choices. They found that liberals preferred hedonic, novel, and desirable options while conservatives preferred utilitarian, status quo and feasible options. They also showed the mediating role of deliberation. The second paper by Duhachek and colleagues investigates how political ideology affects persuasion depending on ad framing. They demonstrated that conservatives (liberals) showed greater preferences toward products when they were shown the ad highlighting “stability (change).” They also showed the mediating role of a stability (vs. change) mindset. The third paper by Murdock and colleague examines how political ideology influences consumer reactions to warning labels initiated by government agencies. They found that when the FDA is associated with the warning label, conservatives (vs. liberals) showed greater tendencies to engage in unhealthy behavior (e.g., decrease their intention to quit smoking, increase their intention to purchase unhealthy food and order unhealthy side dishes). The last paper by Kaikati and colleagues discusses the impact of political ideology in donation contexts. Specifically, they examine how conservatives

(vs. liberals)’ donation intention will vary depending on the salience of the unifying social identity. They found that when salient social identities increase the motivation for social approval, conservatives increase their donation.

Taken together, the papers presented in this session will make theoretical contributions because all four papers are closely related and well grounded in theory, consequently enhancing our broad and in depth understanding of the relationship between political ideology and a wide range of consumer behavior. Furthermore, each one reports several experiments and presents novel findings to consumer researchers as well as provides important insight for practitioners and public policy makers who are interested in marketing products or developing persuasive messages under the influence of political ideology.

Political Ideology and Consumer Decision Making

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Recent research in psychology, genetics, and neurology have identified fundamental differences in the way people think and behave relative to their political ideology (Alford, Funk, and Hibbing 2005; Kanai et al. 2011). Given these fundamental differences, it is likely that liberals and conservatives vary in the way they make decisions (Kidwell, Farmer, and Hardesty 2012). Yet, surprisingly little attention has focused on understanding how political ideology influences the choices that consumers make.

Political ideology is defined as the set of attitudes that explains how society should function in order to achieve social justice and social order, and is best conceptualized as a unidimensional construct with liberals on the left and conservatives the right (Jost, Federico, and Napier 2009). In order to assess the effects of political ideology, this research focuses on choice preferences. Specifically, the choice preferences between hedonic and utilitarian options, novel and status quo options, and feasible and desirable options are examined.

Conservatives may have a stronger inclination for a status quo option as they are more likely to defend and justify existing systems (Jost et al. 2003). Conversely, liberals are more open to experience which leads them to exploring their environment for what is unique, such as a novel option (Carney et al. 2008).

Some choices require consumers to consider both the process (feasibility) and the outcome (desirability) of the choice. Feasibility follows a low-level construal and is perceived as more concrete, while desirability follows a high-level construal, and is perceived as more abstract (Trope and Liberman 2010). Liberals are more likely to appreciate and prefer the abstract, leading them toward a preference for desirable options, whereas conservatives’ dogmatic thinking leads them to focus on more specific, concrete characteristics (Shook and Fazio 2009).

Finally, consumers’ choices are often composed of deciding between hedonic and utilitarian options. Utilitarian attributes are more objective and easily justified (Shafir, Simonson, and Tversky 1993). This is appealing to conservatives as they seek an ease of justification (Jost et al. 2003). The experiential nature of hedonic options, instead, is better appreciated and more preferred by liberals, as they are more open to experience (Carney et al. 2008).

Deliberation. The one explanation that can synthesize the differences between liberals and conservatives is how much they deliberate when making decisions, where liberals are predicted to delib-

erate more than conservatives. This is supported by the difference in their brain structure, where liberals are more likely to override habitual processing and are more open to experience (Carney et al. 2008), while conservatives are more likely to rely on rules and structure when making decisions and to think in more black and white terms (Jost et al. 2003).

The selection of a status quo option relies more on familiarity and past experience, while deliberation is positively linked to trying something new (Eidelman and Crandall 2009). When comparing feasible and desirable attributes, the evaluation of feasible attributes is often consistent, where the weight assigned to desirable attributes often guides decisions, such that feasible options are chosen when the desirable options are not deemed to be as important (Todorov, Goren, and Trope 2007). Finally, by deliberating less, conservatives are more likely to focus on the objective nature of utilitarian options, where greater amounts of deliberation help liberals justify a hedonic indulgence (Kivetz and Simonson 2002).

Studies Summary. Five studies are conducted to examine political ideology's impact on consumer choice. In study 1 we investigate the reported and actual behaviors of adult consumers relative to their political ideology while controlling for the age and household income of participants. Conservatives were more likely to provide utilitarian reasons for purchasing a vehicle while liberals were more likely to provide hedonic reasons ($\beta = .21, p < .05$). In a restaurant task, conservatives were more likely than liberals to go to nationally recognized restaurants ($B = .32, p < .05$), and were less likely than liberals to try new things at these restaurants ($B = -.26, p < .05$). Conservatives were also more likely to have Microsoft Windows installed as their operating system instead of more novel Linux or Apple operating systems ($B = .44, p < .05$). Finally, conservatives were more likely to prefer feasible vacations which are closer to home and cost less, while liberals would rather go on more desirable vacations which involve traveling farther from home ($\beta = -.22, p < .05$) and spending more money ($\beta = .21, p < .01$).

Studies 2 and 3 provide a more scientific and robust examination of these differences by employing multiple measures of political ideology and choice sets. The results from these studies present evidence that liberals and conservatives make systematically different choices. In studies 2a and 2b conservatives were more likely to prefer utilitarian foods, status quo restaurants, and short but dull (feasible) books while liberals were more likely to prefer hedonic foods, novel restaurants, and long but interesting (desirable) books. In studies 3a and 3b conservatives were more likely to prefer a utilitarian apartment, a status quo mutual fund investment, and a feasible concert gift while liberals were more likely to prefer a hedonic apartment, novel mutual fund investment, and a desirable concert gift.

Study 4 then tests the process mechanism of deliberation underlying the influence of political ideology on decision making using the same choice set from studies 2a and 2b. Deliberation was found to underlie these differences in decision making where liberals deliberated more than conservatives. Deliberation, or the amount of thinking, was solely responsible for these effects and was shown to work apart from the type of thinking and other potential alternative explanations.

Finally, study 5 uses the same choice set from studies 3a and 3b while experimentally manipulating levels of deliberation. Participants in the high deliberation condition exhibited liberal decision making tendencies for all three tasks while those in the low deliberation condition exhibited conservative decision making tendencies regardless of their political ideology. These results provide further support for deliberation as the underlying mechanism.

Stability vs. Change: The Effect of Political Ideology on Product Preference

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Political ideology influences individuals' behavior in the politically related contexts as well as influences individuals' everyday preferences and consumption behavior. In this context, prior research has shown the effect of political ideology on consumer behavior that has political implications (e.g., Crockett and Wallendorf 2004). Moreover, a few researchers have recently begun to examine how political ideology shapes consumer attitude toward products that are devoid of political content (Fernandes and Mandel 2013; Khan et al. 2013). However, little is still known how political ideology influences consumer attitude toward non-political products and how practitioners can apply these findings to their advertising campaigns to attract more consumers.

To fill these gaps, the present research identifies a new mechanism and a new boundary condition of the effect of political ideology on product preference. First, although Fernandes and Mandel (2013) showed that political ideology affects consumer choice for non-political products, they exclusively examined variety seeking. Hence, the current research extends the existing literature by testing a different dependent variable (i.e., product preference). Second, although Khan et al. (2013) showed that conservative consumers prefer national brands, they only looked at a correlation between two variables. From their findings, the causal relationship between two is inconclusive and it is hard to understand "why" political ideology affects consumer preference for non-political products. Therefore, the current research articulates and empirically tests a new mechanism through which political ideology impacts consumer preference for products described in the ads. Finally, scant research has examined how marketing firms can incorporate these findings to their communication campaigns to attract more consumers who have different political ideologies. To address these gaps, this research proposes a new moderator (i.e., ad frame) and tests how conservatives vs. liberals show different preferences for the products when they are shown different types of product ads (i.e., either highlight stability or change).

First, we propose that conservatives will be more likely to maintain their current choices while liberals will be more likely to switch their current choices because previous research has demonstrated that conservatives prefer what is familiar and stable because change produces greater unpredictability and chaos while liberals are more open to experience new environments and pursue the novelty (Jost et al. 2003; Thorisdottir et al. 2007). Second, we posit that conservatives will show greater preferences toward the product when the ad includes the words related to stability (e.g., maintain, keep) than when the ad contains the words related to change (e.g., change, move) while the pattern reverses for liberals because previous research found that conservatives showed implicit and explicit preferences toward words such as "stable," and "tradition" whereas liberals showed implicit and explicit preferences toward words such as "flexible," and "progress" (Jost et al. 2008; Jost et al. 2009). Finally, regarding the mechanism through which political ideology affects consumer preference for products, we propose that political ideology activates different psychological mindsets that might carry over to a variety of subsequent tasks, which drive the effect of political ideology on product preference. Specifically, we propose that conservatives will activate stability mindsets whereas liberals will provoke change mindsets because previous research has demonstrated that conservatives prefer what is stable whereas liberals are more open to what is new (Jost et al. 2003; Thorisdottir et al. 2007). These activated mindsets will subsequently influence consumer preference for products.

Study 1 examined the effect of political ideology on product preferences in the context of the diet program. Participants were asked to imagine that they were on a diet and worked out at the fitness club for last two months but they found that their weight hasn't been changed a lot although they followed the diet program strictly. They were then asked to rate the likelihood that they would renew the membership and that they would switch to the new diet program (1=not at all likely, 9=very likely). The political ideology was measured on a scale adopted from Jost et al. (2007). The result revealed that conservatives were more (less) likely to renew the membership (switch to the new diet program) as compared to liberals.

Study 2 investigated the effect of the match between political ideology and message frames (i.e., change vs. stability) on persuasion. Specifically, participants were presented the ad message regarding the car emphasizing either change or stability (Change condition: We've been changing for 100 years. We're the symbol of moving forward! Change your outlook! [Stability condition: We've been here for 100 years. We're the symbol of consistency! Keep your life great!]). Next, we measured their attitude toward the product and political ideology. We found that a stability (vs. change) appeal was more persuasive for conservatives whereas a change (vs. stability) appeal was more persuasive for liberals.

Study 3 examined the underlying process. If the change or stability mindsets constitute the underlying process, by manipulating this process directly, we should be able to wipe out the effects of political ideology and have only the effects of the ad message frame and the mindset. Thus, in this study, we strived to manipulate the change (vs. stability) mindset directly by adopting the method used by Wood (2010) to examine the role of the change (vs. stability) mindset in the proposed effects. In addition, in this study, we manipulated political ideology through a procedure used by Fernandes and Mandel (2013). The same procedure and instruction to manipulate the message frame (i.e., change vs. stability) were used as study 2. After viewing the ad regarding the car, participants rated their attitudes toward the car. The results indicated that when the change mindset was made accessible, participants preferred the product when the message frame emphasized change while the pattern reversed when the stability mindset was made accessible.

Overall, our findings contribute to the consumer literature by examining the effects of political ideology on consumer attitudes in the politically unrelated contexts and uncovering why conservatives and liberals show different preferences for the products depending on the ad messages. Furthermore, the results have implications for practitioners by showing how they develop better advertising campaigns to attract more customers.

The Effect of Political Ideology on Reactions to Warning Labels and Consumption Regulations

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The escalating health problems stemming from unhealthy consumer behaviors (e.g., overeating, smoking) prompt government officials to use a variety of public policy tools. For instance, in order to deter smoking, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is attempting to require graphic health warnings on all packages of cigarettes (Mears 2012). However, such labels can have unintended effects (Wansink and Chandon 2006), inducing psychological reactance (Brehm 1966), a motivational state focused on restoring a restricted freedom, which can often have a boomerang effect where the restricted activities become more attractive (Fitzsimons and Lehmann 2004).

Research on reactance has shown that warning labels lead to high reactance especially when the label source is deemed as authoritative (Bushman and Stack 1996). For example, college students were less likely to agree with a message advocating teaching machines when the message came from a prominent professor versus a high school student (Brehm 1966). While recent research on reactance has demonstrated how government regulations result in psychological reactance (Laurin, Kay and Fitzsimons 2012), an important factor—individuals' political ideology—has not received much attention from research on reactance. Since political ideology is at the heart of how people react to governments (Jost et al. 2003), it is especially relevant to investigate its role in the context of public policy initiatives and government regulations. We draw on research on political ideology (Jost 2006; Kidwell et al. 2013) and reactance (Brehm 1989; Fitzsimons and Lehman 2004) to suggest that reactions to warning labels and regulations may be influenced by consumers' political ideology. Further, we investigate how the source of these initiatives (e.g., government agency vs. businesses) interact with consumers' political ideology (i.e., conservative vs. liberal) to impact consumer reactions to warning labels and regulations.

Across three studies we demonstrate that 1) conservatives (vs. liberals) are more likely to act counter to the warning label when it is associated with a governmental source (Study 1), 2) this reaction only occurs among conservatives that are high in trait reactance (but not in high-reactance liberals) (Study 2), and 3) the underlying process of this effect is that high-reactance conservatives draw implications from government regulations that possible additional restrictions are on their way (Study 3).

In Study 1, 525 smokers viewed a series of graphic health warnings. The source of the graphic warning label (FDA vs. no-source control) was varied between subjects. In the control (FDA) condition the health warning stated: "(FDA) Warning: Cigarettes are addictive." Political ideology was measured by using a modified version of the political attitudes scale (Nail et al. 2009). The results showed a significant two-way interaction between label condition and political ideology ($p < .05$) such that in the FDA (vs. control) condition conservatives were significantly less likely to quit smoking ($p < .05$) whereas the label source did not have an effect on liberals' quitting intentions ($p > .70$).

In Study 2, 106 participants imagined themselves purchasing a pizza in a grocery store. Label (FDA vs. no-source control) was varied between subjects. The pizza had a front-of-package nutritional label that indicated an unhealthy amount of fat, saturated fat, and salt. In addition to political ideology, we measured participants' trait reactance (Hong and Faedda 1996). Replicating study 1, the results showed a significant two-way interaction between label condition and political ideology ($p < .05$). Further, in line with our theorizing, a significant three-way interaction between political ideology, reactance, and label condition ($p < .05$) showed that the effect was driven by conservatives who are high in reactance.

In Study 3, 156 participants imagined that they are at a local drive-through fast food restaurant, where due to high obesity rates large beverages had been removed from the menu by either the FDA (government condition) or the restaurant chain (business condition). Participants further imagined that they ordered Combo #1, which includes a cheeseburger and a small soda (no alternative size). Then they were asked which side dish they would prefer with their meal. The results showed that high-reactance conservatives were more likely ($p < .05$) to order an unhealthy side dish when the source of the regulation was the FDA (vs. business), while this effect was not significant for liberals regardless of their trait reactance level. Further, this effect appeared to be mediated by high-reactance conserva-

tives' concerns about potential future government restrictions in the domain of the regulation.

This research adds to the reactance literature by examining the process through which authoritative sources lead to negative reactions to warning labels. Specifically, we show that, at least in the context of warning labels and regulations, political ideology of the consumer is an important factor in reactance. As such, the present research is the first to investigate how differences in the way various consumer groups view the influencing agent leads to reactance and, hence, limits the success of public policy initiatives. Further, our findings add to the political ideology literature by highlighting how threat to freedom can, under certain conditions, trump respect for authority for those with conservative political orientation. From a public policy perspective, these results are important as the FDA may ironically lessen the impact of its own initiatives if consumers know that it is the FDA that is behind the warning labels.

Conforming Conservatives: How Norms of Salient Social Identities Overcome 'Heartless Conservative' Tendencies

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Perceptions of bleeding heart liberals and heartless conservatives abound (e.g., Farwell and Weiner 2000), though some research has demonstrated that these perceptions are not always represented in actual behavior (Brooks 2006) and individuals of either political ideology are equally likely to donate, as long as the cause aligns with their values or moral foundations (Winterich, Zhang, and Mittal 2012). The current research moves beyond political ideology to consider how the multiple identities that consumers hold impact the extent to which political identity, and corresponding perceptions of giving, actually impact donation decisions.

While conservatives may have more individualistic and competitive orientations than liberals, who tend to have more prosocial orientations (Van Lange et al. 2012), research has also demonstrated that conservatives are more likely to conform to group norms (Cavazza and Mucchi-Faina 2008). Moreover, Jugert and Duckitt (2009, p. 698) argue that "the personality dimension of social conformity should increase group identification, since persons with a dispositional tendency to conform to their group's norms should be inclined to identify more strongly with their groups." This research suggests that conservatives will be more likely to conform to the donation tendencies of their group than liberals, but, notably, conformity is not limited to the political group with which one identifies.

Consumers hold multiple identities (Winterich et al. 2012), which may differ in salience at any given moment (Reed 2004). For instance, although students from the same university can define themselves in terms of liberal—conservative social identities, situational constraints can lead the same individuals to ignore these identities and to focus instead on the shared college identity for self-definition. Contextual activation of this common in-group identity heightens the need to maintain in-group cohesiveness and harmonious relations with other group members. Here, we expect that conservatives will be particularly motivated to comply with the norms and stereotypes of the salient in-group, even when this in-group consists of 'bleeding heart liberals.' In this context, conservatives faced with charitable decisions that would be discussed with *fellow college students* holding liberal views should be motivated to seek approval from the audience (Torelli 2006), and hence factor into their decisions the more generous expectation of their fellow students. In turn, this will boost their own generosity to fit with a liberal audience's norms for charitable giving. When a common social identity (e.g., fellow college students) is not salient, though, the effect of a liberal

audience on increasing conservatives' generosity will be attenuated. This conformity to group norms by conservatives is consistent with the personality trait of politeness, a sub-dimension of agreeableness, that is reflective of conservative beliefs (Hirsch et al. 2010). Moreover, the desire to conform to manage one's impressions among group members reflects a greater value on binding or group-focused moral foundations, which include group loyalty and duty, by conservatives (Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009). Notably, while liberals also hold multiple identities that may differ in salience, liberals do not value conformity to the same extent as conservatives.

The current research focuses on donation decisions in the case of needy people judged to be responsible for their plight (Reyna et al. 2005) for which behavior consistent with heartless conservatives has been previously demonstrated. Two studies show that conservatives who anticipate accountability to individuals who hold the opposing political ideology exhibit greater generosity in their charitable decisions, compared with those who anticipate interacting with individuals holding the same political ideology or those making charitable decisions in private, and that this effect is mediated by the desire to seek approval from the audience. This effect emerges only when a shared identity (i.e., college student identity) is salient and is only observed for conservatives rather than liberals. The effect disappears when the charitable cause involves a politically polarizing issue inconsistent with conservatives' moral foundations.

In study 1, students from a Midwestern university were divided in three groups and were asked about the amount of money they would donate to an individual in need. They were further told that they would later discuss their decision with *fellow college students* described as liberals (conservatives), or made a private decision. Half of the participants in each group were presented with a non-polarizing cause ("a person with medical problems due to obesity caused by poor diet and lack of exercise," Farwell and Weiner 2000), whereas the other half were presented with a polarizing cause ("a person with AIDS due to promiscuous homosexual relations—from pre-test). Results showed that conservatives (liberals) exhibited greater generosity (no change) toward the needy person in the non-polarizing condition when accountable to liberals versus when accountable to other conservatives or making decisions in private. Furthermore, this effect was mediated by the desire to seek audience approval (White and Peloza 2009). The effect was absent for the polarizing cause that was inconsistent with conservatives' moral foundations.

In study 2, we provided further evidence of mediation and, importantly, also showed that the effects dissipate when a common identity is not salient. Half of the college student participants were presented with the non-polarizing cause in Study 1 and made their donation decision under the expectation of discussing it with *fellow college students* (*salient social identity* condition) described as either liberals or conservatives, whereas the other half made a decision to be discussed with *others* described as liberals or conservatives (*non-salient social identity* condition). Results from this study replicated the findings in Study 1 in the salient social identity condition, but showed that the effects dissipated in the non-salient condition.

Drawing from the rich literature on conformity among conservatives, we show that while conservatives may be rigid in their beliefs (i.e., the rigid attitudes of the right, Jost et al. 2003), they may actually be more malleable in their behavior. Specifically, in order to manage impressions, conservatives motivated to comply with the norms and stereotypes of the salient in-group will alter their behavior, resulting in increased donations that conflict with perceptions of heartless conservatives. Future research should consider the extent to which such conformity in behavior can alter attitudes through self-perception.

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